

STATEMENT OF SENATOR JOHN McCAIN  
CHAIRMAN, SENATE COMMITTEE ON  
COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION  
FULL COMMITTEE HEARING  
ON NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD REAUTHORIZATION  
JULY 15, 1999

- This morning the Committee will discuss reauthorization of the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB). The Chairman of the NTSB, Jim Hall, will testify, and he is accompanied by Peter Goelz (pronounced goalz), Managing Director, Daniel Campbell, Deputy Managing Director, and Craig Keller, Chief Financial Officer.
- I want to begin by commending the NTSB for the excellent work it does. The staff of the NTSB works tirelessly, and in many cases, under the least desirable circumstances. Their commitment to accident investigation and the development of safety recommendations to prevent accidents from recurring is admirable. I know the Congress and the Board Members appreciate and applaud their dedication.
- The Committee is particularly interested this morning in learning what the Safety Board believes Congress can do to assist it in fulfilling its mission.
- The Safety Board has submitted a wide-ranging 3-year reauthorization request, one that seeks 100 more employees than currently authorized, significant funding increases, clarification of Safety Board investigation priority, personnel management reforms, and electronic recorder disclosure protections. I can assure you that the Committee will do everything it can to assist the Board, within our given budget constraints.
- While I have the highest regard for the Board, I would be remiss if I didn't express concerns over what appears to be a serious lack of budget restraint in one particular area - namely Board Member travel expenditures.
- According to NTSB travel documents, only 15 percent of Board Member travel has been accident-related in the past five years. Non-accident domestic and foreign travel accounts for 85 percent of the total travel expenditures--with 51 percent for domestic travel and 34 percent for foreign travel. While I recognize a legitimate need may exist to participate in important seminars and to gain greater professional expertise that may necessitate travel, this is simply excessive.
- From January through the first week of June 1999, more than \$121,805 has been spent by the 5 Board Members. Of this amount, only 12 percent has been accident related according to Safety Board information.

- Upon review of NTSB travel data over the past five years, Board Members have traveled to dozens of exotic foreign countries including South Africa, Nepal, China, and Indonesia in addition to yearly visits to France and England--sometimes several trips to Paris in a single year. NTSB travel reports show that taxpayers are even covering the travel expenses of a Board Member to lecture at a university in California. I find this baffling. I am further frustrated to learn that procedures governing Board Member travel have been essentially non-existent.
- I am informed that just yesterday, Board Members were given individual travel budgets to abide by. The travel budgets would cover only non-accident foreign and domestic travel. Under the plan, the Chairman would have a foreign and domestic travel budget of \$50,000 a year, the Vice Chairman would receive \$25,000, and each of the other three Board members would receive \$20,000. Although the travel budgets would be less than some Board members currently spend, the Safety Board Members would still have a non-accident related travel kiddy of \$135,000 a year. That seems excessive for non-accident travel. In fact, that exceeds the total amount of all Board Member travel in 1996.
- Consequently, I believe these budgets are still too high and I think a strong case can be made for further restraints on Board Member travel. I will be very interested to hearing from Chairman Hall regarding this issue.
- As my colleagues on the Committee know, other federal agencies under our jurisdiction have travel approval guidelines. For example, all foreign travel involving DOT modal Administrators requires a request to the Office of the Secretary for approval. The FTC and the FCC also have procedures governing member travel. It seems only reasonable the Safety Board take fiscally responsible action to eliminate travel excesses. And, I intend for our Committee to also take appropriate action to ensure NTSB travel expenditures are reigned in.
- Again, thank you Chairman Hall for taking the time to appear before us today. I will ask you to proceed with your statement after hearing opening comments from the Committee members.